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ABSTRACT

The United Kingdom's Modern Apprenticeships were introduced in September 1994 to provide young people in the United Kingdom with a route to achieving the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at Level 3 or above, including a progression into higher education. The pilot implementation of Modern Apprenticeships involved 2,400 teenagers and approximately 14 industrial and business sectors. Modern Apprenticeships seemed to work best where there were existing partnerships among employers, industry training organizations, training and enterprise councils, and further education (FE) colleges. Funding arrangements for Modern Apprenticeships proved to be complex and different across the United Kingdom because of local conditions and different Modern Apprenticeships models. It was concluded that although FE colleges may not appear to benefit directly from involvement in provision of Modern Apprenticeships, they do reap indirect benefits by improving their links with local industry. Three possible roles for FEs in the provision of Modern Apprenticeships (partner, supplier, and enabler) were discussed. It was recommended that more research be conducted to identify those factors that are likely to facilitate or hinder successful implementation of Modern Apprenticeships. (Appended is a list of 13 Further Education Development Agency publications.) (MN)

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PAUL ARMSTRONG

Back to the future

What are Modern Apprenticeships?

There is no simple answer to this question. Modern Apprenticeships are a national programme, but not only are there differences between England, Wales and Scotland, but each occupational sector has been making its own response; each Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) has its own interpretation. This diversity and variety makes it very difficult to make general statements.

In September 1994, the prototype Modern Apprenticeships were introduced. Modern Apprenticeships are part of the government strategy for strengthening the economy and making it more competitive through the development of a well-trained and flexible work force. The initiative recognises the importance of encouraging young people to attain the high-level skills that are required to meet National Targets.

Modern Apprenticeships are intended to provide young people with a route to achieve NVQs at Level 3 or above, including progression into higher

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education (HE). Government funding has been made available to support employers, working with Industry Training Organisations (ITOs), TECs and others. According to the then Employment Department 2,400 teenagers and 14 or so industrial and business sectors were involved.

The 14 sectors were:

- Agriculture
- Business Administration
- Chemicals
- Child Care
- Electrical Installation
- Engineering Manufacturing
- Engineering Construction
- Information Technology
- Marine Engineering
- Merchant Navy
- Polymers
- Retail
- Steel
- Travel Services

Three others — Construction, Plumbing and Wool Textiles — began later in 1994-5. Each sector had a TEC to take the lead in developing the design and delivery of Modern Apprenticeships.

The following features were observed in the implementation of the pilot.

Training — content and outcomes

Skills, knowledge and understanding are specified and need to be assessed and accredited at NVQ Level 3 or above. They need to provide the breadth and flexibility required by employers and should include core skills such as communication, numeracy, problem solving and working with others.

The learning outcomes should be achieved in the shortest, most practical and realistic time. As with other recent training initiatives and unlike traditional apprenticeships, the Modern Apprenticeship does not entail time-serving. Individuals have learning plans that set targets they can aim for at their own pace, according to their own needs and abilities.

Modern Apprenticeships do not normally specify how learning should be achieved. However, the delivery of training should take account of the appropriate balance of different types of learning, the need for effective learning support materials, as well as the arrangements, skills and competence of training staff and others involved in ensuring that the learning plan is met.

Implementation — rights and expectations

The development of Modern Apprenticeships will be supported by changes in the provision of careers education and guidance for young people. It is proposed that by giving careers advice and guidance at an earlier age, young people will be better able to make decisions about their post-16 options, including the availability, entry criteria and application procedures for Modern Apprenticeships.

The typical age of entry is between 16 and 17, the age restrictions being dictated by the funding arrangements, not the learning frameworks. The selection is usually be made by ITOs or employers, bearing in mind what they expect the young person to be able to do and what outcomes they expect them to be able to achieve.

Since the minimum level of achievement is an NVQ at Level 3, employers need to bear this in mind and are likely to take into account previous academic records of achievement, but will be aware that this is not the only, or best, measure of potential in the vocational field. Employers also need to take on board the fact that the Modern Apprenticeships are promoted as an equal opportunities programme.

Modern Apprentices can expect to have their learning plan formalised as part of a written learning agreement between an employer (or group of employers) and the young person, which will be underwritten by the local TEC. This agreement contains the obligations of both parties to follow the learning plan through to a successful outcome, subject to the normal rights and responsibilities of employers.

It is the aim that all Modern Apprentices should have employed status at the start of their learning programme. How much they are paid is a matter of negotiation between the employer and the young person, but takes account of the fact that the employer is investing in the young person's learning and that success at this stage is likely to be reflected in higher pay differentials in later years.

ITOs involved in developing frameworks for the prototype year (1994-5) and for the expansion in 1995-6 are entitled to claim match funding support within specified limits, for the development of relevant materials. ITOs are the organisations responsible for designing Modern Apprentices on a sectoral basis, with the TECs retaining responsibility for the delivery.

In 1995-6, it is expected Modern Apprenticeships will be introduced in another 40 sectors and provision in the initial 17 extended. TECs will implement those which reflect their local labour markets.

Funding matters

Funding arrangements for Modern Apprenticeships are proving to be complex and different all over the country, because of local conditions and the different models of Modern Apprenticeships. For example, if the training and assessment is integrated with GNVQs, there will be funding implications (see *Engineering the Future*, Bulletin 9, FEDA, 1996). At the moment, there is not a strong relationship between funding and curriculum design.

The issue of FEFC funding is equally unclear. Since Modern Apprentices have employed status, learning programmes will not normally attract FEFC funding, except where additional education and training is provided. Colleges in the prototype phase had variable success in attracting FEFC funding and it depended very much on a range of contingent factors and interpretations of the rules. Generally, however, colleges are optimistic about future funding.

Why should FE be involved?

However complex the funding arrangements, one conclusion can be made from running the prototypes. Colleges do not see Modern Apprenticeships as a way of making money. Even where colleges reported that they did not need to develop the curriculum very much or innovate, there needed to be some investment in ensuring that the high-quality outcomes would be achieved.

FE colleges should be supportive of Modern Apprenticeships because they are generally well placed to provide:

- pre-courses, where required
- structured induction
- learning or training plans
- off-the-job training
- training resources
- underpinning knowledge
- core skills
- portfolio development
- assessment
- assessor training
- learner support
- career guidance
- progression routes
- quality assurance

Moreover, they are generally well placed to act as agents for TECs in liaising with employers and ITOs, assisting in marketing, advising on selection and recruitment, assisting in completion of paperwork, and raising employers' awareness of developments in vocational training and education.

There is an important role for FE in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises to benefit from Modern Apprenticeships, through — for example — networking. Larger companies will need the expertise of FE to provide support in delivery of vocational educational components.

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Models of FE provision in Modern Apprenticeships

Modern Apprenticeships are intended to be industry-driven and employer-led. As such, they are like traditional apprenticeships to which FE could respond. It has become quite apparent in the prototype phase that FE does have a significant support role to play in ensuring that Modern Apprentices achieve their outcomes and targets.

Broadly speaking, the variations in the models are along three dimensions, as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1.

- **partner** — equal/unequal
  — the colleges may be an equal or an unequal partner with one or more organisations, including their local TEC, employers or ITOs

- **supplier** — customer-driven/provider-led
  — the colleges may provide a range of services specified by the customer (be it the local TEC, employers, or ITO) or they may offer a finite range of off-the-shelf services and courses or programmes

- **enabler** — agency/investor
  — the colleges may have an extended role in supporting Modern Apprenticeships, by offering a wider range of services that enable the Modern Apprenticeships to be provided. This would include selection, recruitment and employment of the Apprentices, through their managing agents, as agents of the TEC, or by seeing this an investment that goes beyond the Modern Apprenticeships themselves, but for future custom of local employers, particularly small and medium enterprises

These provide a three-dimensional framework as the basis for examining FE models of provision. Any FE provider could be located in terms of one or more of these dimensions.

Partner

For the clearest expression of a partnership, we can look at the cases of two FE colleges working with a large car manufacturing company; also in the partnership are the local TECs and other employer organisations.

Both College A and College B were already working in partnership with the car company before the introduction of Modern Apprenticeships through the company's Integrated Engineering Development Scheme. Indeed, the partnership in developing GNVQs in Engineering were already the focus of another FEDA project (see *Engineering the Future*, Bulletin 9, FEDA, 1996). This was not merely a matter of the employer purchasing off-the-job learning from the two colleges, but of active co-operation in matters to do with curriculum design, delivery and assessment and building on prior collaborative work. The employer, however, remained responsible for marketing, selection and recruitment.

Supplier

Colleges C and D are prime examples of colleges supplying a range of services to employers as customers, in support of their Modern Apprenticeships. In

practice, the elements of partnership identifiable in the consortium arrangements including Colleges A and B are present in this case. The difference is largely a matter of emphasis and more to do with the origins of the relationship. In off-the-job provision for the Modern Apprenticeships in Electrical Installation and Chemicals, College C and D were already in networks of collaborative relationships, not with just one major employer, but with a large number of small and medium-sized employers, drawn together under the aegis of the lead body and its ITO, as well as with a number of direct contract employers. These two colleges had also established a good working relationship with the local TEC.

Although College C came late into the scheme, in many ways it represented an ideal of how Modern Apprenticeships should work. All apprentices were employed when they began the programme and were chosen by their employers to go on the Apprenticeship. The college had sufficient numbers to run three groups without needing to 'infill' on any existing courses or programmes already on offer, though the apprentices from direct contract employers were put together with those who came through the ITO. The college had an established relationship with the ITO's national scheme and welcomed their invitation to take part in the prototype scheme.

Enabler

The other five colleges included in the project during the prototype phase might all be termed 'enablers'. They not only networked and co-operated with their local TECs, the training agents providing an off-the-job learning programme, but found themselves actively involved in promoting the Modern Apprenticeships with the TECs to gain the interest and enthusiasm of local employers. Two colleges, E and F, were acting as the TECs' agents, while college H saw its involvement in offering support for Modern Apprenticeships in IT as an investment.

These three colleges are all in a region where there are fewer employment opportunities than in other parts of the country. Even in sectors that have a tradition of apprenticeship, such as engineering, there have been fewer employment opportunities. For example, both Colleges E and F had been severely affected by the rapid downsizing of a large, local company, which had been a major customer for college-based apprenticeship training.

College H was providing a Modern Apprenticeship in Child Care, an occupation which not only does not have a tradition of apprenticeships, but where it is difficult to find work placements for those under the age of 18, because of legislation. Colleges E and F were both offering Modern Apprenticeships in Engineering Manufacture and both had a good working relationship with both their local TEC and ITO, which act on behalf of the engineering industry to run the Modern Apprenticeship in Engineering Manufacture.

Colleges can address the acquisition of core skills and the relevant underpinning knowledge and understanding to achieve the NVQs together with the broader knowledge and understanding required for career progression. On the other hand, the development of work-based skills is expected to take place at work, perhaps backed up with periods of off-the-job learning.

Colleges H and I had more recently been approached by their TEC to take an active involvement in Modern Apprenticeships.

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Summary of key findings

- Colleges have vital expertise and experience to support the provision of Modern Apprenticeships by:

  — providing pre-Apprenticeship courses, induction, off-the-job training, resources and equipment, core skills and underpinning knowledge, assessment and assessor training
  — advising on portfolio development and recording achievement
  — acting as intermediary between employers and apprentices with ITOs and awarding and certificating bodies
  — assuring quality outcomes for each apprentice's learning or training plan
  — providing progression opportunities for those achieving learning outcomes
  — tracking, monitoring and evaluating individual achievement and successful outcomes
  — assisting in completion of necessary documentation
  — raising employers' awareness of S/NVQs and GNVQs
  — supporting employer liaison and consortia, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises
  — liaising with careers service
  — identifying employment and work experience opportunities
  — providing advice, guidance and support on marketing, selection and recruitment, where required

- Relationships with the TECs and the TECs' interpretations of requirements vary considerably from one area to another. Funding matters, targets and outcome funding are among the aspects where divergence occurs

- There are also variations between the range of occupational sectors

- Modern Apprenticeships seemed to work best where:

  a) there was an existing and more or less equal partnership between employers, ITOs, TECs and colleges
  b) where there are employment opportunities for young people
  c) where the occupational area has a history of apprenticeships (e.g. engineering manufacture and electrical installation); otherwise, there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure that the Modern Apprenticeships are offered, taken up and delivered effectively and efficiently

- Colleges may not appear to benefit directly from involvement in provision of Modern Apprenticeships, but do indirectly through the improvement of links with local industry

- More research is needed on the factors that are likely to contribute to or hinder the successful implementation of Modern Apprenticeships

Commentary

The purpose of this project was to investigate Modern Apprenticeships in their prototype phase, with particular reference to the role of FE in the design, provision and management of learning. It attempted to identify, analyse and provide guidance on curriculum models which would help with the extension of Modern Apprenticeships from 1995, and contribute to the enhancement of learning through FE, beyond the minimum requirements of NVQ Level 3 and core skills.

The nine colleges which took part in the project reflected the diversity of approaches and models. This diversity was based on such contingent factors as occupational sector (including previous history of apprenticeships and statutory regulations and controls), availability, accessibility and quality of NVQs, geographical locality, conditions of local economy (including unemployment, size and nature of local companies), previous relations with local employers and their organisations, TECs, ITOs and awarding bodies, the role of the colleges' industry liaison officer (ILO), support of colleges' senior management, other vocational provision including GNVQs (see *Engineering the Future*, Bulletin 9, FEDA, 1996), local school staying-on rates, and commitment of college staff to make the prototypes work.

The report identified the following factors as crucial to the success of the prototypes:

- effective partnerships
- motivation
- flexible course planning
- design delivery and assessment
- college responsiveness
- funding

For successful support of Modern Apprenticeships, colleges will need to consider their motivation and purpose (including the fit with their mission), working in partnership, identification of customers and satisfying their needs, and their capacity to contribute to the development of vocational education and training.

FE can add value to apprentices' learning outcomes (including offering progression routes through to and beyond NVQ Level 3). Early indications suggest they will have a pivotal role to play in linking with HE, to offer a genuine alternative to staying on at school or doing GCEs as route into HE.

For a copy of the full report, please contact Ossie Pereira at FEDA, South East Region, c/o SRCET, PO Box 2055, The Mezzanine Suite, Civic Offices, Reading RG1 7ET.
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PROJECT COLLEGES

The FE colleges which took part in this FEDA project were:

The College of North West London, East Birmingham College, Mid-Warwickshire College, North Hertfordshire College, Oaklands College, South East Derbyshire College, Stroud College, West Cheshire College, West Thames College

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